

לך-לך

TORAH OR COMMON SENSE

The *Gemara* (*Bava Kama* 46:, *Kesubos* 22•, *Avodah Zarah* 34:, *Nidah* 25•) sometimes discusses a certain issue and cites a particular *pasuk* to prove its point. The *Gemara* then asks: why is it necessary to refer to a *pasuk* to prove the point? The conclusion, it seems, can also be drawn from *svara* — common sense. The *Gemara* infers that common sense carries greater weight in its conclusiveness than even a *pasuk*. There are certain great truths stored in the human subconscious that rival even the legitimacy of the *pasuk*. The above *Gemara* could easily have asked the question in reverse: why would you use *svara* to prove a point, if this point can be substantiated by a *pasuk*? Obviously, logic, a product of the human mind, contains profound truths that vie with the authority of the truths of the Torah.

The *Gemara* (*Nidah* 30:) teaches that while a fetus is still in its mother's womb, it is taught the entire Torah. When the child is ready to enter this world, a *Malach* makes him forget what he was taught. The question arises: why bother teaching the child Torah if he is going to be made to forget it? What is the purpose of such short-lived knowledge?

The Vilna *Ga'on* (*Divrei Eliyahu, Keilim*) quotes the *Alshich Hakodesh* who suggested that every Jew owns a share of the Torah, as is evident from the prayer:

תן חלקנו בתורתך

Give us our share in the Torah (*Shabbos Shemoneh Esrei*).

The Vilna *Ga'on* states that *Chazal* had this in mind when they exhorted us to trust someone who claims:

יגעתי ומצאתי תאמן

I sought, therefore I found (*Megillah* 6:)

The reference is to the Torah, which each individual was privy to in the womb, and subsequently lost. For if the individual did not experience forgetfulness at birth, there would be no need for “seeking.” The responsibility of each individual is to seek to restore the Torah that he once possessed.

The Torah taught to us by the *Malach* in the womb remains with us forever as part of our subconscious. In an absolute sense we do not really forget its teachings; that knowledge is just pushed to the deeper recesses of the mind. Our role in this world is to strive to reclaim that Torah.

Rabbeinu Nissin Ga'on (in his introduction to *Berachos*) asks why the early generations were punished for acts contrary to the Torah even before the Torah was given to man. Why, for example, were the inhabitants of Sodom punished for being “wicked and sinners” (*Bereishis* 13:13)? They did not receive the Torah; nowhere do we find an injunction against this type of

behavior. Why should they be held accountable for committing an act which only later on would be defined as sinful by the Torah? By what standard did they deserve punishment?

Rabbeinu Nissin Ga'on suggests that man is required to follow the dictates of his conscience. Man's conscience is invested with Torah; Hashem created man with Torah as part of his mental composition (see *Meshech Chachmah, Devarim* 30:11-14). Hence, any action which deviates from the dictates of good conscience is deemed sinful behavior. When Adam was created, the Torah was built into his being; the same applies to all mankind. When a human being claims to suffer from a guilty conscience, he is actually admitting to having rebelled against a precept of the Torah. The *Shelah Hakadosh* expresses an identical dictum in relation to *Klal Yisrael's* failure to kill the Midianite females in *Milchemes Midian (Parshas Matos)*. When logic dictates something to be true, there is no need to wait for orders. If someone does not understand something he is supposed to understand, that is classified as sin.

We can now understand the *Gemara's* assertion in assuming that the use of logic holds equal validity with a *pasuk*. Logic is an expression of the human mind. It is one of the manifestations of the Torah that was stamped into man at the time of creation, and into each individual within the womb.

How is the Torah of the conscience (or subconscious) to be reconciled with the Torah given to *Klal Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*? Torah represents the actual thought of Hashem; it was presented to the *Am Hanivchar* — the chosen people — as a formal treaty binding *Klal Yisrael* to Hashem (Maharal *Chidushei Aggados, Gittin* 60•; *Tiferes Yisrael* 16, 68). Torah is not merely a way of life; it is life itself. Torah raised *Klal Yisrael* from the legions of humanity to a new level unto itself. *Klal Yisrael* is now charged with being the “light unto the nations” (*Yeshayah* 49:6), the teacher of mankind, the conscience of humanity. The Torah of the conscience built into Adam *Harishon*, although less formal than the Torah of Sinai, nevertheless binds man to a standard of conduct. With each ensuing generation since creation, that conscience has become more clouded and the ability of man to decipher Hashem's will through the use of logic has become weakened.

The Chassidic Rebbe, Reb Tzvi Elimelech from Dinov proposes that as far as *halachah* is concerned the only barometer with which to understand the Torah is direct Torah interpretation, not the use of logic. He proves this with a *Gemara* in *Eruvin* (14:). The Sages ask: How do we know that a circle with a circumference of three handbreadths will have a diameter of one? They deduce it from a *pasuk* in *Divrei Hayamim* (II 4:2): “He made a round molten pool ten cubits in diameter...and thirty [cubits] in circumference.” Why would *Chazal* turn to a *pasuk* to prove what can be deduced from a simple mathematical equation? In matters of *halachah* the reliance on mere logic is not sufficient.

The Vilna *Ga'on* offers an additional proof that reliance on logic in the explanation of *mitzvos* is not indicated. The *Mishnah* in *Shabbos* (11•) states that “one may not read by candlelight [on *Shabbos*]” without offering any reason for this injunction. Yet, the following *Beraisa* (ibid. 12:) explains:

One must not read by a candlelight on *Shabbos*, for fear that the reader might come to adjust the flame.

The *Gemara* then relates an incident involving Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, who thought that this simplistic reason offered by the *Beraisa* would not apply to him. He knew that in going into

the reading session he could be vigilant in not adjusting the flame. One *Shabbos* while he was reading in this fashion, he was almost overcome by an impulse to adjust the flame. Then he acknowledged “How great are our Sages who said, ‘one must not read by a candlelight [on *Shabbos*],’” i.e. for simply stating the prohibition without an explanation.

The Vilna Ga’on explains that once Rabbi Yishmael was given a reason for the law, he felt that he could take care to avoid coming to a transgression. Realizing his own near failure, he now acknowledged the brilliance of the Sages who offered no explanation for their ruling. It was only after Rabbi Yishmael heard the *Beraisas*’ reason that he thought he could circumvent it. Hence, the Vilna Ga’on concludes that halachically one may not rely on logic, but only on the absolute interpretation of the Torah.

This concept is best visualized by considering *Toras Avraham* versus *Toras Moshe*. Avraham observed the entire Torah (*Yoma* 28:) with all its intricacies, even the laws of *eruv tavshilin* and *eruv chatzeiros* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 49:2). The tractate *Avodah Zarah* of Avraham Avinu contained four hundred chapters (*Avodah Zarah* 14:), which makes our mere five chapters pale in comparison. Avraham is credited with authoring the *Sefer Yetzirah* (*Kuzari* 4; see Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 19). “Every day, Hashem in conjunction with the heavenly court makes new laws — and even these laws were known to Avraham” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 64:4).

How did Avraham amass this knowledge, if it was not taught to him? Since he had no teacher and no formal training, his knowledge was self-realized; where did it come from?

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Vayigash* 11) answers this question:

רשב"י אומר נעשו שתי כליותיו כשני כדים של מים והיו נובעין תורה שנאמר 'אף לילות
יסרוני כליותיי' (תהלים ט"ז). ר' לוי אמר מעצמו למד את התורה שנאמר (משלי י"ד) 'מדרכיו
ישבע סוג לב ומעליו איש טוב'

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: “His two kidneys became like two water pitchers and they were giving forth a flow of Torah, as it is stated: ‘...Also in the nights my kidneys instruct me’” (*Tehillim* 16:7). Rabbi Levi remarks: “From himself did he learn Torah, as it is stated: ‘...and a good man shall be satisfied from himself’” (*Mishlei* 14:14).

Both Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Levi are referring to Avraham’s intellect. In Biblical imagery, the kidneys are the seat of human instruction (*Berachos* 61•). Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is inferring that within man there exists a deep well of understanding from whence he may draw forth knowledge. Rabbi Levi is emphasizing the uniqueness of Avraham Avinu; he was the first man to glean Torah knowledge from his own intellect. Avraham was the first person to transfer the Torah concepts which were imprinted into the subconscious of man into a viable conscious form. His common sense was able to discern every commandment Hashem gave at Sinai. Concurrently, the school of Sheim and Eiver, in distant Yerushalayim, perpetuated the traditions and teachings handed down from Adam *Harishon*. It was only later in his life that Avraham encountered his great...grandfathers Sheim and Eiver and studied with them.

אברהם...היה תלמיד לאבי אביו עבר...ואברהם-סגלת עבר ותלמידו, ועל כן נקרא "עברי"
Avraham was a disciple of his great ...grandfather Eiver..so that the Divine
calling was passed on from great..grandfather to great.. grandson... It was

because of his closeness and similarity to Eiver that he was called Avraham the *Ivri* (*Kuzari, Sha'ar 2*).

The Torah given at Sinai, through Moshe *Rabbeinu*, was a direct transmission from Hashem to man on a conscious level. *Klal Yisrael* relinquished control of their mental independence, and agreed to subjugate their conscious and subconscious to the will of Hashem.

The *Tur Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* (139) explains the difference between the two blessings recited daily prior to the commencement of Torah study. The first one blesses Hashem for giving us “His Torah” — referring to the written Torah, which was given to us verbatim by Hashem through Moshe *Rebbeinu*. The second blessing states that He “planted within us eternal life” — that refers to ‘*Torah Shebe'al Peh*,’ the Oral Law, which was planted within every individual.

The *Midrash* relates:

שעתידין ישראל לילך אצל אברהם אבינו וא"ל למדנו תורה, והוא א"ל לנו אצל משה
שלמדה מפי הגבורה

In the future *Klal Yisrael* will approach Avraham *Avinu* requesting him to teach them Torah. He will tell them... go to Moshe because he learned Torah directly from Hashem (*Shemos Rabbah 2:6*).

Avraham felt that Moshe’s Torah, coming directly from Hashem, was superior to his own Torah, which was derived from his own mind. Nevertheless, when the *Mishnah* seeks to personify the epitome of a Torah teacher, Avraham is chosen.

כל מי שיש בו שלשה דברים הללו הוא מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו, ושלשה דברים אחרים
הוא מתלמידיו של בלעם הרשע

Whoever possesses these three qualities is among the disciples of our father Avraham; and three other qualities distinguish the disciples of the wicked Bilaam (*Pirkei Avos 5:22*).

Hashem expressed His confidence in the knowledge that Avraham would perpetuate Hashem’s teachings.

כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת אחריו ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט
For I have known him, that he may command his children after him, that they may keep the way of Hashem to do righteousness and justice (*Bereishis 18:19*).

However, the Torah of Avraham *Avinu* was all self-learned. Avraham gleaned Torah knowledge from his own intellect (*Bereishis Rabbah 95:3*), which seems contradictory to our established standard of *mesorah* — tradition. *Mesorah* implies the handing over of tradition from Hashem to man, from teacher to student (Maharal, *Derech Chaim 1:1*). Where was Avraham’s *mesorah*? What was it exactly that Hashem was so sure that Avraham would pass along?

רק באבתוך חשק ה' לאהבה אותם ויבחר בזרעם אחריהם
Only in your fathers did Hashem delight to love them, and He chose their seed after them (*Devarim 10:15*).

The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:21) states that all the favors which Hashem displayed to *Klal Yisrael* were only due to His love of the Patriarchs. Even the guarantee of *Olam Haba* to every member of *Klal Yisrael* was only the result of Hashem's love of the Fathers. The fact that *Klal Yisrael* is privy to the Torah at all is due only to the merit of the Patriarchs (*Shemos Rabbah* 31:2). What kind of knowledge did these extraordinary men possess; a knowledge which seemingly was not grounded in *mesorah*?

דאסתכל קב"ה באורייתא עד לא יפיק עבידתיה לאומנותיה

The *Zohar* (*Bereishis* 1:1) establishes that upon the creation of the world, Hashem consulted the Torah as a blueprint.

The *Midrash Rabbah* (*Bereishis* 1:1) states:

כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה ובורא את העולם

Hashem consulted the Torah and then created the world. (See also *Zohar*, *Terumah* 161; *Bereishis Rabbah* 3:5)

The *Gemara* (*Berachos* 55•; *Menachos* 29:) clearly states that the world was created by Hashem utilizing a combination of the Torah's letters. Rabbi Akiva, moreover, called the Torah, "the precious instrument by which the world was created."

The great originality of Avraham *Avinu* was that he studied the heavens and he saw Hashem. He studied the celestial bodies and he saw Hashem. He studied the earth, its terrain, and its vegetation, and he saw Hashem (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:1). Avraham (and similarly, Yitzchak and Yaakov) understood that implicit in nature is the recognition of Hashem. Torah represents the thought processes of Hashem, and the world was created with the use of the Torah. Hence, to understand nature is to become cognizant of Hashem.

The Malbim (*Tehillim* 19) explains that there are two parallel means by which to gain knowledge of Hashem: the study of nature and the study of Torah. Since Torah was used to create nature, nature, in effect, is part of Torah. The study of nature utilizes sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch in addition to the intellectual processes. The great Chassidic master, the *Sefas Emes* (*Bereishis* 631) points out that the *Asarah Ma'amaros* — the Ten Utterances ("Let there be light" etc.) — with which the world was created are an intrinsic part of Torah, and that it is the responsibility of each individual to discern Hashem in the workings of nature.

The *Gemara* expounds:

כל המתפלל בע"ש ואומר ויכולו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו נעשה שותף להקב"ה במעשה
בראשית

He who prays on the eve of *Shabbos* and recites "and [the heaven and the earth] were finished" is considered by the Torah as though he had become a partner with Hashem in the act of creation (*Shabbos* 119:).

The *Gemara* means that when an individual recognizes the accomplishments of Hashem in *Ma'aseh Bereishis*, he actually has a share in the creation (Rashi, *ibid.*). The recognition of Hashem's accomplishments is of primary importance. The *Gemara* (*ibid.*) seems to equate *dibbur* — speech — with *ma'aseh* — action — as is evidenced by the *pasuk*:

By the word of Hashem were the heavens made (*Tehillim* 33:6).

It might be correct to assume that there is a parallel between the *Aseres Hadibros* — the Ten Statements of *Har Sinai* (incorrectly referred to as “the Ten Commandments” as there are at least thirteen commandments contained within those Ten Statements) and the *Asarah Ma’amaros*. The *Asseres Hadibros* contain within them the entire Torah (Rashi, *Shemos* 24:12; Abarbanel, *Shemos* 20); while the *Asarah Ma’amaros* are the means by which nature was created. Hence, biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology, biochemistry, astrophysics, etc. may very well be (in an elementary form) the *Asarah Ma’amaros*. The sciences, if understood properly, are actually a facet of Torah, and knowledge of the sciences should be a means of recognizing Hashem.

Avraham Avinu did, in fact, have a form of Torah which was a direct *mesorah* of Hashem. Avraham studied nature, the sciences, and thereby recognized the presence of Hashem and taught it to the world by means of extensive lectures and published books (Rambam, *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3). This was the first *mesorah* of Torah which Hashem bestowed upon humanity, as opposed to conscience which was built into humanity. However, once Hashem bestowed His Torah directly upon *Klal Yisrael*, it became the superior method of becoming familiar with Hashem (*Shemos Rabbah* 2:6). This is a common explanation of the *Mishnah*:

המהלך בדרך ושונה, ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר מה נאה אילן זה, מה נאה ניר זה, מעלה עליו
הכתיב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו

One who is mentally reviewing his studies while traveling on the road, and who interrupts those studies to say “How lovely is this tree” or “how nice is this field” is deserving of death (*Pirkei Avos* 3:9).

For the Jewish people, once the Torah has been given at Sinai, a reversion to the study of nature and the world as a means of understanding Hashem is not acceptable. (See also *Nefesh Hachaim, Sha’ar* 1, chapters 21 and 22 concerning the Torah knowledge of the Patriarchs). Hashem intended for the Torah to be used as a guidebook in the running of our world. The Torah was stamped into the consciousness of man to orient his behavior in conformity with Hashem’s rules. Nature, man’s environment, constantly serves to remind man of the power of Hashem. The fact that the Torah lives in our minds and totally surrounds our physical beings should be enough for any rational man to embrace Hashem.

It is man’s way, however, to take this world for granted, to fail to recognize the subtle direction of Hashem behind our moral conscience. Because of this, Hashem gave us the Torah at Sinai, to ensure that errant man gets the message.